



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

TWO POEMS OF BEGINNINGS.

By PROFESSOR EDWARD B. POLLARD,
Columbian University, Washington, D. C.

POETRY is not, as some suppose, synonymous with fancy, and at the opposite pole from truth. On the contrary, the sublimest truths have usually been presented first in poetry. When these begin to appear in prose they are far on the way toward common property, if not toward the commonplace. There has always been some basis for the view that "the poets are our only truth-tellers."

Now, the Bible is poetic almost throughout. About four-fifths of the Old Testament is Hebrew poetry. In this respect, at least, the Bible is not different from other great writings of antiquity, for they are all more or less poetic in form. Prose is a comparatively late invention.

Even the careless reader of Scripture must have observed the similarity between the first verses of the book of Genesis and the opening lines of the gospel of John. For both commence with the thought: "In the beginning—God."

These opening poems are given side by side, not only because of their moral sublimity, which is unmistakable, but also because of the interest which attaches to them when compared as poems of "first things." They furnish, too, good illustrations of the method in Hebrew poetry. For notice not only the fact of parallelism or the balancing of thought with thought, line with line—which is the most common mark of Hebrew poetry—but also a less common *chain* effect, in which a second line takes up the leading word or idea in the first; the third, that of the second; and so on to the end of the strophe. This may be most readily traced, for example, in the second strophe of the second of the poems below, in the words *him—made, made—life, life—light, light—darkness, darkness—it* (him); thus returning to the point of departure.

The same art may be traced in the first strophe of the first poem, though not *verbally* so perfect in form as that given above. The links here are in some instances the same word; in others, the same idea. Thus we have *God—earth, earth—chaos, darkness* (chaos)—*deep, face of the waters* (deep)—*God*; and we are back to the starting-point, which is God.

The strophic divisions of the two poems are also of interest; the first being uniform, four lines, two couplets composing each. The second, however, is progressive, there being six, eight, ten, and twelve lines respectively in the body of the poem, with an introductory and a concluding strophe of four lines each.

If one be tempted to the thought that this kind of writing is artificial and unworthy of an inspired author, let one remember that the artistic is not to be identified with the artificial. It is a gratuitous assumption to suppose that inspiration would reject the beautiful in form, while holding to the beautiful in substance. It is not to be assumed that a writer, guided by the divine spirit, will be less likely to yield himself to the dictates of the beautiful than one not so illumined. And, what is more conclusive still, we actually find that the inspired writers of the Sacred Scriptures do make use of art in their presentation of truth. To be sure, artificiality and forced effects are not consistent with the highest inspiration. But if a child of the eighteenth century "lisped in numbers for the numbers came," why may it not be quite as natural for one whose mind and heart have been attuned to the deeper, diviner harmonies to give out his message in a form consonant with the inner truth and beauty which that message is intended to reveal? God, as he expresses himself in nature, speaks in rhythm, in magnificent harmonies. And one has well called Hebrew poetry nature's own rhythm; for its continual balance of line with line finds its prototype in the swaying to and fro of the bough, the alternate play of the wings of the flying bird, the rise and fall of the fountain, the ebb and flow of the tide, the heaving of the emotion-filled bosom.

I.

POEM OF THE FIRST MORN—THE LIGHT OF DAY.

I.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,
And the earth was desolation and a waste,
And darkness was upon the face of the deep,
And God's spirit was brooding upon the face of the waters.

2.

And God said :

Let there be light,
And there was light ;
And God saw the light, that it was good ;
And God divided the light from the darkness.

3.

And God called the light day,
And the darkness he called night.
And it was evening, and it was morning,
The first day.

II.

POEM OF THE FIRST-BORN—THE LIGHT OF LIFE.

I.

In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God,
And the Word was God,
The same was in the beginning with God.

2.

All things were made by him,
And without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life,
And the life was the light of men;
And the light shineth in darkness,
And the darkness apprehended it not.

3.

A man came, sent from God, whose name was John,
The same came for a witness
To witness of that light,
That all might believe through him.
He was not the light,
But came to bear witness of the light.
There was the true light,
Which lighteth every man, coming into the world.

4.

He was in the world,
 And the world was made by him,
 And the world knew him not.
 He came unto his own,
 And his own received him not;
 But as many as received him
 To them gave he right to become children of God,
 To them that believe on his name,
 Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man,
 But of God.

5.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,
 And we beheld his glory,
 The glory of the only begotten of the Father,
 Full of grace and truth.
 [John beareth witness of him and crieth saying,
 This was he of whom I said,
 He that cometh after me is become before me,
 For he was before me.]
 For of his fulness have we all received,
 And grace for grace.
 For the law was given by Moses,
 Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

6.

No man hath seen God at any time.
 The only begotten Son,
 He who is in the bosom of the Father,
 He hath declared him.

A close examination of this latter poem will show the chain connecting the strophes, especially strophe 3 with strophe 4 through the word *world*; strophe 4 with strophe 5 through the word *flesh*. In strophe 5 we have a break in the "chain effect" by the introduction of lines concerning John's testimony, indicated by the brackets. Leaving the bracketed portion out for the moment, we observe the chain taken up again, through the links *fulness, grace and truth*. But note that the lines in brackets link themselves closely with strophe 3 (the other verses concerning John) through the words *witness* and *come*; as closely indeed as if they had originally belonged together.

In these poems, so full of beauty and sublimity, we have two of the noblest expressions of the divine revelation. In the first God expresses himself through physical light, as he utters the word, and darkness flees away.

He spake, and it was done.

He commanded, and it stood fast.

In the second, through the Eternal Word, God expresses himself as the light of spirit and of life—the light that lighteth every man, coming into the world.

A Meditation.

John 10:10. “I am come that they may have life and may have it abundantly.”

How different is this idea of a world-savior, and consequently of a gospel, from that of many religious teachers of the past and of the present! Others have told him who was ambitious to attain the divine likeness to cease to live, or at least to live only enough to keep from suicide. Sometimes this reduction of life has been physical, and men have all but starved; sometimes it has been intellectual, and men have all but ceased to think; sometimes it has been ascetic, and men have abandoned the good things of the world to those who are not ambitious for righteousness. Jesus sets himself against all these perversions of nature. Divine sonship does not consist in minimizing, but in magnifying, life, and the means of such enlargement is that which is the very heart of Jesus' mission—a revealed God.